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Response to *Holocaust Poetry and Translation*

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Jean Boase-Beier's contribution outlines how translators might engage with the multilingual communication that lies "at the heart" of Holocaust poetry. This response discusses how far the issues she presents, though highlighted by exceptionally harsh conditions, might be relevant for translating other poetries. It also suggests other themes in poetry translation scholarship which might enrich insights into the translation of Holocaust poetry. As with Boase-Beier, these discussions are informed by my own poetry-translating experience.

The Central European intellectual heritage that fell victim to the Nazis was not only multilingual, but also deeply rooted in translation. The 1974 Collected Poems of Miklós Radnóti (1909-1944), for instance, contains his Hungarian translations of work by 66 Greek, Latin, English, French and German poets. Translating poetry that testifies to this heritage raises both intertextual and intercultural issues. For instance, the title of Radnóti's poem *À la recherche ...*, hand-written in a school notebook in a Nazi slave camp, can be retained unchanged for European readers, who can mentally add Proust's *du temps perdu* – whereas a translator into Thai, say, might have to (over-)translate it to "In search of lost time".

Boase-Beier stresses the specific origins and reading of Holocaust poetry. With Radnóti's notebook, these are crucial. Every educated Hungarian knows how this notebook, found in Radnóti's overcoat pocket in a mass grave, identified his body. Translating the 1985 facsimile edition confronted me, as its translator, with a factor usually overlooked: how a source text's physicality is part of the reading experience, and how this might be conveyed to readers of its translation. This was solved by adding the facsimile to the UK edition (2000).

Boase-Beier highlights the Holocaust poets' drive to preserve a culture of complex communication in a viciously simplistic world, and its implications for translation. This drive is not restricted to Holocaust poetry. In 1992, Sarajevo, a city of multiple ethno-cultural heritages, was besieged by the Serbian-ethnonationalist forces of Radovan Karadžić, now on trial for genocide. Marko Vešović (himself of Serbian heritage) wrote how the smoke of his cigarette, snatched in the street between bombardments, reveals "Karadžićevu vaseljenu / u kojoj Logor je – Logos" ('Karadžić's universe in which the Camp is – Logos'). This interlingual wordplay, referencing St John's "En archē ēn o lógos", intellectually resists Karadžić's monoethnic universe. For me, as its translator, it was crucial to retain this – by glossing "srpskim logorima" earlier in the poem as "the *logor*, the Serbian camp", then concluding with the trilingually resistant "Karadžić's universe / whose *Logos* is the *Logor*" (in Arsenijević 2011:172-173).

This raises the wider issue of how translators might tackle multilingually-textured works. Monolingual solutions ("Karadžić's world / where the Word is the Camp", say) are often easier to find, and more fluent. However, a fluent translating style can conceal messages embodied in a source poem's *dysfluencies* (Venuti 1995:24) – Ausländer's, Radnóti's and Vešović's resistance to monoethnicity, for instance. And concealing multilingual texture, especially when translating into English, is particularly problematic because many

translation readers will be monolinguals not otherwise aware of the cross-language, multi-ethnic relations underlying the source poem's context.

In communicating these and other relations, Boase-Beier advocates dialogue between translator and target reader via translation commentaries. Publishers agree, it seems: prose prefaces are rare in non-translated poetry collections, but translator's introductions are common in translated collections. She also implies a role for commented *bilingual* editions. This is not without risk, however. In one poetry publisher's view, readers of target-language-only editions experience translations as poems in their own right, rather than comparing them, often invidiously, against originals on the facing page (P. Jay, personal communication).

Indeed, any understanding of translated Holocaust poetry involves considering how it is read as target-language poetry. This implies considering not just the translated poem's mind-style, but also its rhyme, rhythm and other sonic effects, its word-choice, imagery and nuances. It also arguably implies grasping the nettle of translation quality. In Celan's *Todesfuge*, for example, the vowel-rhyme and colloquiality of Boase-Beier's "there you won't lie so tight" is more poetically convincing for me as a reader than the strained formality of Hamburger's "there one lies unconfined" – reflecting the only legally-tested criterion of translation quality, that it should be "fit for purpose" (Hammond 1995). Unfortunately, though quality criteria, and their relationship with translation commissioners' and target readers' expectations, have been extensively discussed for non-literary translation, this is an area where respectable poetry translation scholars fear to tread – but which is therefore all the more worth exploring.

Examining the motivations and processes behind translators' decisions could also enhance insights into translated Holocaust poetry. Poetry translators typically aim to write a 'meta-poem' – a convincing target-culture poem which reliably reports on another poem in terms of content and linguistic texture (Holmes 1988:10,50, cf. Jones 2011). As it is often hard to fulfil all these aims, translators have to compromise in different ways, though effectively recreating what they see as the source's underlying poetic intent is a frequent fall-back position. Creative, i.e. novel but appropriate, solutions may be a tactic to achieve this (Jones, *ibid.*). Felstiner, for example, conveys the stone-like succinctness of Celan's words in *Todesfuge* (e.g. "Meister": 'master/teacher/expert/craftsman') by gradually shifting the poem from English back to the original German: "this Death is a master from Deutschland [...] this Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland [...] der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland" (Felstiner 1995:31). Compromises and creative interventions can also reveal the translator's interpretative voice and persona within the target poem: here, for instance, Felstiner speaks as a German-English translator, but also as an American poet and a Holocaust scholar.

Boase-Beier's, Hamburger's and Felstiner's *Todesfuge* suggest a final insight from translation scholarship that can enrich the study of Holocaust poetry. Important poems and poets are often repeatedly re-translated. As no poem can have one perfect translation, new translations are better not – or not only – evaluated as improving or failing to improve on their forerunners. They should also be seen as adding to a collective reading of the source work that is more revealing than one version in isolation.

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